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WRONG ADDRESS

Referring to expansion of the Viceroy's Council, Mr. Amery in his recent speech said that "Mr. Jinnah, the leader of the Muslim League, while regarding our general declaration of policy as satisfactory, was only prepared to join the Viceroy's Council on terms that would have prejudged the future in another sense". The question naturally arises: in what other sense? Mr. Amery leaves the question unanswered, nor does he tell his hearers what those terms were or how an acceptance of the same would have "prejudged the future".

To appreciate the propriety or otherwise of the Muslim League terms and to see whether or not they "prejudged the future," it is necessary to delve for a little while in what is now past history. War had broken out in Europe and his Majesty's Government wanted to utilise the resources of the Indian continent in their war against the Axis forces. The peoples of this continent were told that it was a war which was equally theirs, for, it threatened, if not their independence, at least the possibility of the same. For that purpose co-operation of the leaders of the Indian peoples was essential. But how to get that co-operation?

Just when the Government of India were racking their brains to devise a formula, Mr. M. A. Jinnah dropped a hint in one of his conversations with the Viceroy to associate the representatives of the various political parties in India, within the framework of the present constitution and without prejudice to the major issues latter on, with the authority of Government as an interim measure for the duration of the war. The Viceroy took up the hint and announced his intention of re-organising his Executive Council accordingly.

The Muslim League and the Congress being the two greatest and most influential bodies of public opinion, representing two different peoples—the Muslims and the Hindus respectively—the Viceroy first approached these two for co-operation in the matter. While the Muslim League declared its readiness, within the framework of the present constitution and without prejudice to the major issues later on, to shoulder the responsibilities of mobilising the resources of the continent for the defence of India, the Congress refused to co-operate within the framework of the present constitution.

After this refusal by the most influential organisation of the Hindus, the Muslim League was left alone to shoulder that responsibility. The Muslim League, therefore, was perfectly justified in demanding more than 50 per cent representation on the Viceroy's Council. The League was, nevertheless, prepared to share equal authority in the Government with the Congress if the latter was, at all, willing to come in at the outset; if, however, the Congress thought of coming in some time later, their share in the authority of the Government was to be determined by the general sense of the Council.

In times of emergency, such as the present war, composite councils cannot, of necessity, be formed on the basis of the numerical strength of the parties or interests in a country. The only consideration, influencing the composition of such councils, should be the measure of resourcefulness of those parties. Even to-day the Cabinet of Mr. Churchill includes more Labour members than what their numerical strength in the Parliament could allow. Resourcefulness, not arithmetic, should determine their share in the authority of Government. On that principle the Muslim League's offer to share equal authority in the Government with the Hindus was a modest one. For, Muslim India, besides contributing generously in money towards the war funds and supplying man-power in greater proportion than that of the Hindus, has already given the standing Army of India no less than sixty-five per cent of its personnel.

The response from the Viceroy to Muslim League's offer of co-operation amounted to a negation of partnership. The whole position was effectively summed up by Mr. Jinnah in his admirable speech in the Central Legislative Assembly on November 19, 1940. He expressed himself to the following effect:

> You want my help. You are in danger and so am I. We will not apportion the degree of danger between us both. We both are in danger. I am willing to throw into the pool all the resources I can command and I say, "I am ready; let us both face together the peril and the danger. Let us both sink or swim. But what about my having a voice in the use of the assets that I bring into this pool, leave alone a share in the victory. Am I not to have some share, some voice, some say as to how it is going to be used, and how the joint venture is to be run?" The answer is—"Oh, no, I will use that as I like. I will take you as my partner. So you will also have a voice and a share and a say in the matter." What will be my share? I ask. "I will give you two jobs to your representatives." What is going to be the total number of the Controlling authority? "I cannot tell you." Who else is coming into this portfolios? "I cannot tell you". It means really, to put it shortly—"I will have you as my partner, but I will give you only one-pie share." In that case why do you want my partnership in name or at all? Is that business?

Co-operation of the representatives of the political parties was being sought as an interim measure for the duration of the war, which amounted to a war contract. But contract or no contract, the terms of the Muslim League in no way "prejudged the future"; for they did not go beyond the framework of the present constitution. The Viceroy, however, was not prepared to accept those reasonable terms and the matter ended there. Mr. Amery's complaint that the League members were not allowed to join the "National Defence Council" has, therefore, been directed to the wrong address.